

Korn & Wisemiller Building  
520 Prince Street and  
202 S. St. Asaph Street  
Alexandria  
Virginia

HABS No. VA-704

HABS  
VA  
7-ALEX,  
155-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

## KORN &amp; WISEMILLER BUILDING

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Location: 520 Prince Street and 202 S. St. Asaph Street, Alexandria, Virginia (southeast corner intersection with Prince Street), now divided into two houses with separate entrances.

Present Owner: Mr. and Mrs. Joseph E. Ozefovich own 520 Prince Street; Dr. and Mrs. Forrest F. Weight, Jr. own 202 S. St. Asaph Street.

Present Use: Residences

Statement of Significance: A late eighteenth century merchant's house built for business and residential needs, this four-square structure invites comparison with Alexandria's best. The "row-end" pediment and the Doric doorway are worthy of particular notice.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

## 1. Date of erection: c. 1792

The history of this property is confused by sales and subdivisions, deeds of trust and one recorded instance in which the then owners advertise a section for sale and then buy it back, not only from the purchaser but the owner before him. Missing Alexandria Land and Personal Property Tax Assessments for 1791 through 1795 further complicate the question of determining without question the identity of the builder and the actual construction date. In any case, the insurance policy taken on the three-story brick building with "Front room accoutered as a Retail Store," by Korn and Wisemiller in 1796, gives us a glimpse of a substantial bakery operation, complete with associated "Bake house" and "Store house." A retrospective view of antecedent buildings is suggested by the telescoping brick ell which possibly qualified as "appurtenances" in the complex real estate transactions involving the narrow strip of land on which it stood. This "residue" passing to Korn and Wisemiller in 1792 undoubtedly cleared the way for the construction of the building by that firm. Thus, in the light of this interpretation, the newspaper advertisement of December 13, 1792 by Robert Hamilton Co.:

TO BE LET - The Store and Cellar of the house lately occupied by Mr. John Korn . . .

may assume added significance.

Pertinent abstracts from the Alexandria Deed Books are found under Original and subsequent owners, below.

2. Architect: Unknown
3. Original and subsequent owners: From the beginning this property was constantly put up as collateral in business deals by various owners.

The chain of title from 1788 is as follows:

C (Hustings) p. 192, 22 April 1788: William Ownbread of Alexandria to Jacob Wisemiller for £ 120 - a "corner lot" - 20 feet on Princess (sic) and 80 feet on St. Asaph - "with appurtenances."

D (Hustings) p. 92, 1 July, 1789: Deed of Trust by William Eichenbrade and wife to John Corn (sic) and Jacob Wisemiller of Alexandria, Bakers, as Tenants in Common - to secure debt to them of £ 140 - if £ 70 paid with interest by July 1, 1790, this deed void.

Begin at corner of a Lot heretofore granted Jacob Wisemiller and "from thence with St. Asaph Street and fronting thereupon 47 feet, in depth 38 feet 5 inches . . ."  
Bounded on the West by St. Asaph Street, and on the South and East by lands now or late of Neil Mooney and on the North by the lot of Jacob Wisemiller . . ." with all houses, outhouses, edifices . . ."

D (Hustings) p. 145, 9 July 1790: William Eichenbrade (Ownbread) and wife to John Korn and Jacob Wisemiller, Biscuit Bakers, for £ 100 (and no annual ground rent).

Begin on East side St. Asaph Street 80 feet South of Prince and go South on St. Asaph Street 46 feet;  
East parallel to Prince, 38 feet 5 inches;  
North parallel to St. Asaph Street 46 feet;  
West parallel to Prince Street 38 feet 5 inches to the Beginning -- "and all houses, building . . ."

(This deed recites that John Alexander on 19 December, 1774, conveyed to William McKnight, cabinet maker, of Alexandria,  $\frac{1}{2}$  acre lot bounded on the North by Prince Street, and on the West by St. Asaph Street, for an annual ground rent of £9 5s. Thereafter McKnight sold parts for annual ground

rents "sufficient to satisfy and discharge the yearly rent of £9 5s. and that McKnight on 13 October 1783 conveyed to William Eichenbrade, under the name of William Ownbread, the following part of said quarter acres, free of ground rent:

Begin at west corner of a house on said lot occupied by Neil Mooney;  
West parallel with Prince 38 feet 5 inches to a street now known as St. Asaph Street;  
South 126 feet;  
East 38 feet 5 inches parallel with Prince Street;  
North in a direct line to the beginning.  
Special covenant -- if those who should pay a ground rent on their parts of this  $\frac{1}{4}$  block didn't -- William Ownbread could enter and take possession of entire lot.

D (Hustings) p. 154, 20 July 1790: William Eichenbrade and wife to Korn and Wisemiller Biscuit Bakers -- W. E. owes K. & W £ 50, so deeds "residue of parcel" he got from William McKnight -- that is:

Begin 20 feet from intersection of Prince and St. Asaph Streets;  
Go South parallel with St. Asaph Street 80 feet;  
East parallel with Prince Street 18 feet 5 inches;  
North 80 feet to Prince Street;  
With Prince Street 18 feet 5 inches to the beginning.

Deed "void" if W. E. pays £ 50 plus accrued interest by 20th July next -- if he doesn't K & W can "advertise publicly and make sale," after giving ten days public notice.

D (Hustings) p. 282, 9 August 1791: Korn and Wisemiller sell the "residue" bounded above to Job Green for £ 108 10s, after advertising on July 26 sale of August 8th.

D (Hustings) p. 287, 10 August 1791: Job Green, mariner, sells back the "residue" to K & W for £ 120.

D (Hustings) p. 421, 21 April 1792: William Ownbread of Port Tobacco, Maryland, sells to John Korn and Jacob Wisemiller for £ 106 17s 6p, the same piece of ground "and appurtenances" referred to in D-154, 282 and 287 above.

Korn and Wisemiller signed deeds of trust in 1799 and 1806. Deed Book X (Circuit Court of District of Columbia for the County of Alexandria) recites how this property was sold pursuant to the latter claim, at public auction

on April 26, 1813 and bid on by the Bank of Alexandria for \$4,900.

On March 10, 1818, the Alexandria Gazette reported that 520 Prince Street, recently occupied by Mrs. Carcroff, was advertised for sale by L. McKenna. It was described as having two elegant frame mantels and two of Italian marble.

In 1819, the Bank of Alexandria acquired the adjoining vacant lot to the east, formerly owned by John McKnight, thus accounting for the enlarged premises.

The chain of title from 1832 is as follows:

U-2, p. 129, 5 December 1832: President, Directors, and Co. of the Bank of Alexandria conveys property to Horatio Clagett of the Town of Alexandria.

Y-2, p. 73, 22 August 1838: Horatio Clagett puts up all property in above deed in deed of trust to William Page to cover various notes (Page was in business with Clagett)

S-3, p. 107, 29 June 1857: Francis L. Smith and J. Louis Kinzer, convey to Elizabeth A. Page, property sold by court order at public auction 8 November 1856.

W-3, p. 181, 1 May 1865: Elizabeth A. Page conveys to Edward Hughes; Hughes assumes debt of Page to Walter Mitchell of Maryland.

5, p. 519, 13 May 1876: Henry B. Clagett to Edward Hughes, releasing trust (S-3, p. 109) -- "property described in deed of trust aforesaid."

Little else is known about the ownership of the property between 1876 and the 1960's. In 1968, 520 Prince was conveyed from Mrs. Walter C. McVey to Mr. and Mrs. Joseph E. Ozefovich. In 1971, 202 S. St. Asaph was conveyed from George Klipstein to Dr. and Mrs. Forrest F. Weight, Jr.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

As far as is known, no one has reported a ghost inhabiting the building. Yet it was the scene of a singularly tragic happening in 1796. The columns of the Alexandria Gazette for January 9 unfolds a real shocker:

Yesterday presented a scene which for savage desperation hardly has its parallel. Between 5 and 6 o'clock in the morning the family of Messrs. Korn and Wisemiller was alarmed with the cries of murder in the upper story of

their dwelling, but before those who were up in the house had more than halfway ascended to the apartment whence the cries issued, they were met by a negro woman who had just breath to make them understand that her husband had attempted her life, and pointing to her throat, where there was then a razor sticking, fell dead at their feet--to complete the dreadful catastrophe, the perpetrator, immediately on the woman's getting out of the room, threw himself, head-foremost, from the garret window of a three-story house to the pavement, putting a period to a life, the termination of which exhibited a frenzy not to be accounted for and a spectacle too horrid for description. The parties were upwards of 60 years of age.

Hardly had insurance coverage for \$11,500 been taken out by Korn and Wisemiller (June 8, 1792), than the property was again in the news. The Gazette for June 11 carried a notice:

To the Citizens of Alexandria

An Englishman, that is come to make this place his residence, observed lately, with some degree of concern, the confusion that was manifested at the time Korn and Wisemiller's warehouse was on fire . . . "He pointed out that "if the fire had been left undiscovered for a little time longer," it could have had serious consequences and destroyed much of the City. Made suggestions for improving fire companies procedures, etc.

The Bake House was evidently moved about 1805 to property which Korn and Wisemiller acquired in 1798, the southern half block bounded by Washington, Columbus, Duke, and Prince Streets--where the Alexandria Hospital stands today. They evidently shifted from retail to wholesale transactions. The ensuing advertisement from the Alexandria Gazette for November 21, 1808 gives us a review of their real estate interests in town and country:

FOR SALE OR RENT--The three-story Brick House, corner of Prince and St. Asaph Streets. The house is 38 feet square, with a two-story kitchen; smoke and other out-houses, and adjoining on St. Asaph Street a two-story frame warehouse 20 by 30 feet. The lot is 38 feet on Prince Street and 128 feet deep on St. Asaph Street.

ALSO

Several undivided Lots to suit the purchaser, situate on Washington, Duke, and Columbus Streets.

LIKEWISE

About 20 acres of land, lying on the Little River Turnpike Road, one mile from town. On the premises are a good dwelling house with necessary out-houses, and a garden in a good state of cultivation, the remainder meadow. One hundred and sixty-four acres of land, two-and-one-half miles from Alexandria on the Colchester road, part in wood, with two tenements thereon.

November 21

KORN AND WISEMILLER

The chapter in the building's history, which the older residents of Alexandria recall, began in late 1832 with its purchase by Horatio Clagett from the Bank for \$4,000.

In the PHENIX (sic) Alexandria Cazette, December 28, 1832:

H. Clagett informs his friends and the public that he has lately removed from the City Hotel and has established a BOARDING HOUSE at the corner of Prince and St. Asaph Streets (one square above the Potomac Bank, and one square south of White's Auction Store) where he will be happy to accommodate Boarders by the day, month or year; also Travellers that may prefer a comfortable Boarding House to a Tavern. The situation is in the most desirable and healthy part of the Town. Dinner Parties will be furnished whenever required and HACKS furnished Centlemen and Ladies who wish to visit Mount Vernon and return to Dinner.

Clagett had operated a tavern in Port Tobacco, Maryland before moving to Alexandria and before becoming proprietor of the City Hotel served as innkeeper at the Sign of General Washington on Horseback (later the Marshall House).

On December 15, 1845, the Alexandria Gazette advertised the Mrs. Eliason's Boarding and Day School for Young Ladies at this address. This followed by six years the 1839 advertisement that H. Clagett was offering property desirable for a boarding house or boarding school.

In 1848, "The Alexandria Hotel Company" was incorporated by the General Assembly of Virginia by Robert H. Miller, Henry Daingerfield, Lewis McKenzie and other leading citizens. Edward Hughes was proprietor of the Hotel in 1876. The property remained a hotel until 1908 when it was offered for sale (see the Alexandria Gazette for October 28, 1908).

C. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources: Alexandria Deed Books, C (Hustings), p. 192; D (Hustings), pp. 82, 145, 154, 282, 287, 421; L (Hustings), p. 416; N (Circuit Court of District of Columbia for County of Alexandria), p. 47; X (Circuit Court of District of Columbia for County of Alexandria), p. 274; I-2, p. 172; U-2, p. 129; Y-2, p. 73; S-3, pp. 107, 109; W-3, p. 181; 5, p. 519. Alexandria Gazette as cited; Alexandria Land and Personal Tax Assessments, from photocopies owned by the Historic Alexandria Foundation; and Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia, microfilm records in the Alexandria Public Library.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Caton, James R. Legislative Chronicles of the City of Alexandria. Alexandria: Newell-Cole Company, Inc., 1933.

Hopkins, C. M. City Atlas of Alexandria, Virginia. Philadelphia, 1877.

Kabler, Dorothy H. The Story of Gadsby's Tavern. Alexandria: Newell-Cole Company, Inc., 1952.

Prepared by Worth Bailey, Consultant for  
The Historic Alexandria Foundation  
Mrs. Hugh B. Cox, Research Chairman  
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Edited by  
Antoinette J. Lee  
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PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The unmistakable Georgian character of the building underscores the persistence of earlier styles and building details which lingered in Alexandria long after the Revolutionary War.
2. Condition of fabric: While the exterior has survived with few changes, the interior has been radically modified; maintenance good.



B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Three-and-a-half stories, plus cellar; four-bay front. Main block approximately 38 feet square divided by an east-west wall parallel with the ridge of the roof.
2. Foundations: Rubble with stuccoed projection above ending in a quarter round, probable covering brick water table.
3. Wall construction, finish, and color: Brick, Flemish bond along street facades; common bond elsewhere. Absence of brick arches or lintels. Brick painted.
4. Porches, stoops, bulkheads: Modern enclosed frame porches on east.

Present steps on Prince Street are recent construction, but Aquia stone steps now used in garden were probably moved from this location. The moulded Aquia stoop on St. Asaph Street has a wrought iron footscraper.

Basement entrances now marked by iron lids are east of steps on Prince Street and north of stoop on St. Asaph Street respectively.

5. Chimneys: One large common chimney centered on ridge toward east end of building; a second, as indicated by the foundation, has disappeared.
6. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: Pedimented doorway faces west along St. Asaph Street and is of a full Doric order. The six-panel door has corresponding jamb treatment. The sidelighted south door has recessed panels. The north (Prince Street) doorway is of recent millwork. It covers the original fanlighted north doorway with six-panel door and moulded jambs.
  - b. Windows and shutters: A few twelve-over-twelve light double-hung windows remain that are apparently original, but most are now six-over-six lights or large single nineteenth century panes, especially along Prince Street. Original dormer sash was arched, front and back. Shutter hardware fittings appear late.

7. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Gable with red tile to north; asbestos shingles to south.
- b. Cornice: A bold modillion cornice extends across the north facade, continuing across the west gable end to form a pediment.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The long room across the Prince Street facade was undoubtedly the retail store. This part of the building follows a center hall plan on the floors above. The sill of the center window on the north facade lies about one foot below its companions on the second floor, a circumstance probably related to the placement and lighting of the original stair. There is evidence of an earlier stair to the basement where the present one descends at the rear of the hall.

In the adjoining half of the building there is a front side hall with a nineteenth century stairway ascending the stairwell as marked by the fixed sash windows. There is a small room on the front and two rooms in the back, affording a clue to the general arrangement in the south section. The enclosed basement stair led off the room immediately behind the front hall. There is no information on how these now separate buildings were connected, if indeed they were.

2. Wall and ceiling finish: Plastered walls and ceilings, some rooms papered.
3. Doorways and doors: Mixed periods, early and recent. A few original raised panel doors have been updated by the application of ten panels used in combination with flat mouldings characteristic of the nineteenth century.
4. Special decorative features, trim, cabinetwork: Original trim is made up of simple architrave mouldings, a few crosseted; recessed panels in window reveals. A few simple mantels remain and a remnant of paneling above a cupboard opening. The old handrails may have been reused.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: One portion of this dwelling faces northward along Prince Street. There is a pleasant garden space between the south end of the building and the adjoining property. Most of this area, ac-

according to the insurance plats, was covered with buildings so that the brick bats and lime deposits make all efforts at horticulture extremely difficult.

2. Outbuildings: According to the insurance records of the Mutual Assurance Company of Virginia, dated 1796, 1805, and 1815, two rows of outbuildings once lay parallel to St. Asaph Street. Their location and functions varied from one survey to the next, but included a kitchen, smokehouse, stables, bakehouse, and other storehouses.

Prepared by Worth Bailey, Consultant for  
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### PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was a cooperative effort of the Historic Alexandria Foundation and the Historic American Buildings Survey to document some of the most important early Alexandria residences for the HABS collection. The historian was Worth Bailey, an Alexandria resident and former HABS employee. Photographs were supplied by Victor Amato. The material was edited in 1975 by Antoinette J. Lee, working on contract for HABS.